



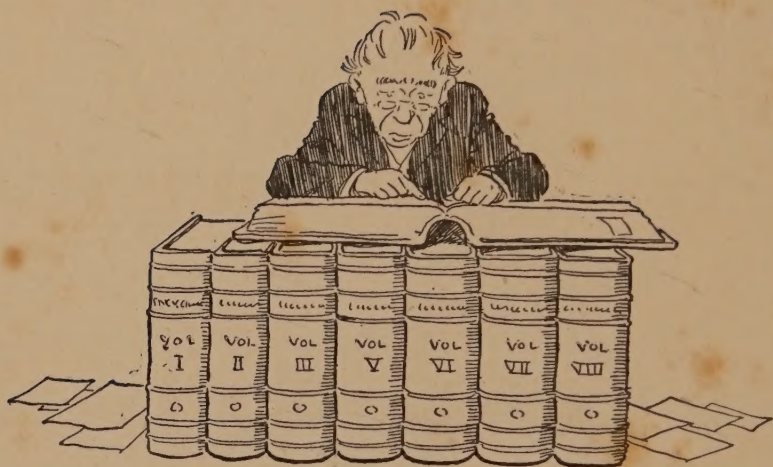
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THE WHEREFORE AND THE WHY



THIS little book is simply packed
With scientific information,
And I can vouch for every fact
And almost every calculation;
But if you think they represent
A life of entomologism,
A life of rash experiment
With every kind of organism,
You mustn't—mine were different *media*;
I owe my facts to my Encyclopædia.

A. P. H.

THE WHEREFORE AND THE WHY

SOME NEW RHYMES
FOR OLD CHILDREN

By A.P. HERBERT



ILLUSTRATED BY GEO. MORROW



METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET, W.C.
LONDON

Second Edition



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A certain comic paper
Has paid me sums of money
For nearly all the hymns herein—
(And so they *must* be funny);
While one at least, I won't say which,
Has actually been
Admitted by a Rector
To a Parish Magazine!
He paid me nothing; all the same,
For giving me permission
To publish forth a second time
Each mystic composition,
Wet-eyed, I here salute them
With equal gratitudes,
The Proprietors of *Punch*,
And the Rector of St. Jude's.

A. P. H.

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To
CRYSTAL AND JOCELYN
AND EVEN
LAVENDER JOAN



The Earwig

HOW odd it is that our papas
 Keep taking us to Cinemas,
 But still expect the same old scares,
 The tiger-cats, the woolly bears,
 The lions on the nursery stairs
 To frighten as of old.

Consid'ring everybody knows
 A girl can throttle one of those,
 While choking with the other hand
 The captain of the robber band,
 They leave one pretty cold.



The lion has no status now.
 One has one's terrors, I'll allow,
 The centipede, perhaps the cow,
 But nothing in the Zoo.

The things that wriggle, jump or crawl,
 The things that climb about the wall,
 And I know what is worst of all—
 It is the EARWIG—Ugh!



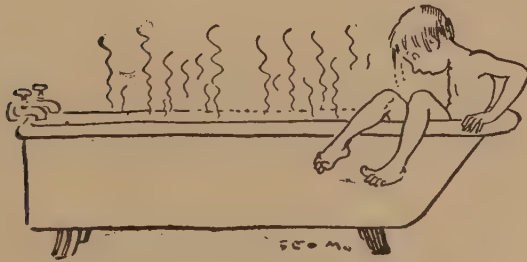
The earwig's face is far from kind ;
He must have got a spiteful mind ;
The pincers which he wears behind
Are poisonous, of course,
And Nanny knew a dreadful one
Which bit a gentleman for fun
And terrified



a horse.

He is extremely swift and slim,
And if you try to tread on him
He scuttles up the path ;
He goes and burrows in your sponge,
And makes one wild terrific plunge
When you are in the bath ;
Or else—and this is simply foul—
He gets into a nice hot tow'l
And waits till you are dried,
And then when Nanny does your ears
He *verrriggles* in and disappears !
He stays in there for years and years,
And *crrrawls* about inside.
At last, if you are still alive,

A lot of baby ones arrive,
But probably you've died.
How inconvenient it must be!
There isn't any way, you see,
To get him out again.
So when you want to frighten me
Or really give me pain,
Please don't go on about that bear
And all those burglars on the stair,
I shouldn't turn a tiny hair
At such Victorian stuff.
You only have to say instead
"THERE IS AN EARWIG IN YOUR BED,"
And that will be enough.





The Snail

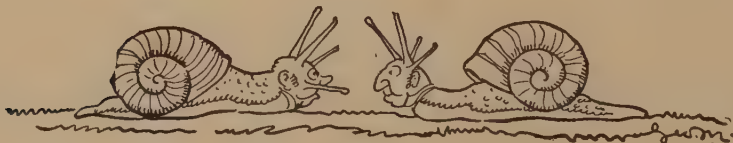


THE life of the snail is a fight against odds,
Though fought without fever or flummox ;
You see, he is one of those gasteropods
Which have to proceed on their stomachs.

Just think how you'd hate to go round on your own,
Especially if it was gummy,
And wherever you travelled you left on a stone
The glistening track of your tummy !



Wherever you hid, by that glutinous trail
Some boring acquaintance would follow ;
And this is the bitter complaint of the snail
Who is pestered to death by the swallow.





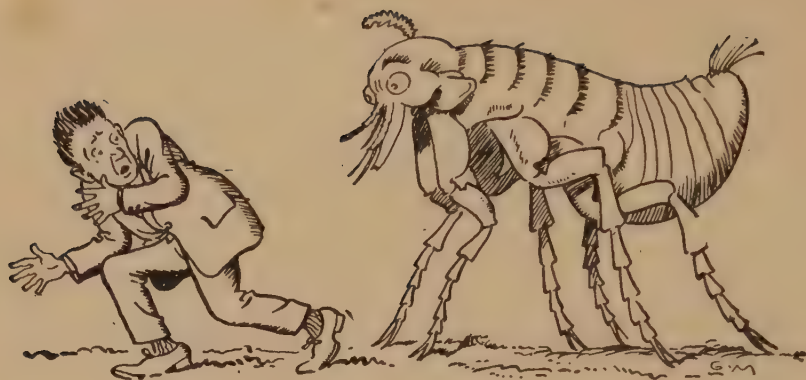
But remember, he carries his house on his back
And that is a wonderful power ;
When he goes to the sea he has nothing to pack,
And he cannot be caught in a shower.

After all, there is something attractive in that,
And then, he can move in a minute,
And it's something to have such a very small flat
That nobody else can get in it.

But this is what causes such numbers of snails
To throw themselves into abysses ;
Since none of the creatures are definite males
And none of them definite Misses,

They cannot be certain which one of a pair
Is the Daddy, and which is the Mummy ;
And that must be even more awful to bear
Than walking about on your tummy.





The —

I NEVER know why it should be
So rude to talk about the —.

What funny folk we are !

I think we've got the jealous hump
Because we see we'll never jump

So skilfully and far.

For if one's nibbled by a gnat
Or harvest-bugs, or things like that,

One seldom keeps it dark.

One may enlarge upon the tale

If one is gobbled by a whale

Or swallowed by a shark,

But if you speak about the bite

Of this abandoned parasite

You're very, very rash ;

So sure it is to raise a frown

I dare not even write it down ;

I simply put a —.

None but an entomologist
Will quite admit the things exist,
And even men like that insist
On using other names,
For when at night Professors leap
Out of their intellectual sleep
Because these organisms keep
Playing their little games,
They never shout "It seems to be
A something something something ——!"
(The word is never used, you see,
Except by artisans);
No, as they fling the bedclothes high,
They give a wild but cultured cry,
"Confound it! Botheration! Hi!"



A pulex irritans!"



The Chameleon

THE chameleon changes his colour ;
He can look like a tree or a wall ;
He is timid and shy, and he hates to be seen,
So he simply sits down in the grass and goes green,
And pretends he is nothing at all.

I wish I could change my complexion
To purple or orange or red ;
I wish I could look like the arm of a chair
So nobody ever would know I was there,
When they wanted to put me to bed.

I wish I could be a chameleon,
And look like a lily or rose ;
I'd lie on the apples and peaches and pears,
But not on Aunt Margaret's horrible chairs—
I should have to be careful of those.

The chameleon's life is confusing,
He is used to adventure and pain ;
But if ever he sat on Aunt Maggie's cretonne,
And noticed what curious colours he'd gone,
I don't think he'd do it again.





The Centipede

THE centipede is not quite nice ;
He lives in idleness and vice ;

He has a hundred legs.

He also has a hundred wives,
And each of these if she survives

Has just a hundred eggs ;

So that's the reason if you pick
Up any boulder, stone or brick

You nearly always find

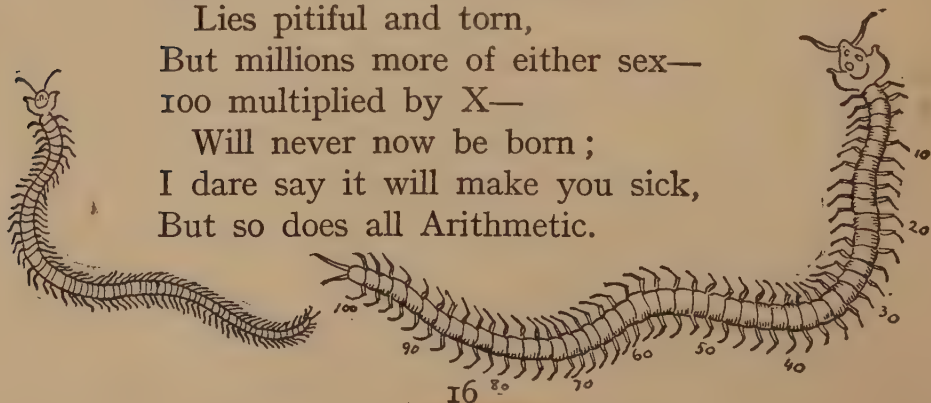
A swarm of centipedes concealed ;
They scatter far across the field,
But *one* remains behind.

And you may reckon then, my son,
That not alone that luckless one

Lies pitiful and torn,
But millions more of either sex—
100 multiplied by X—

Will never now be born ;

I dare say it will make you sick,
But so does all Arithmetic.





The gardener says, I ought to add,
The centipede is not so bad ;
He rather *likes* the brutes.
The millipede is what he loathes ;
He uses wild bucolic oaths
Because it eats his roots ;
And every gardener is agreed
That if you see a centipede
Conversing with a milli—
On one of them you drop a stone,
The other one you leave alone—
I think that's rather silly ;
They may be right, but what I say
Is "Can one stand about all day
And *count* the creature's legs ? "
It has too many any way,
And any moment it may lay
Another hundred eggs !
So if I see a thing like *this* ¹
I murmur " Without prejudice,"
And knock it on the head ;
And if I see a thing like *that* ²
I take a brick and squash it flat ;
In either case it's dead.



1



2



The Whale

AIR: *The Tarpaulin Jacket.*

THE whale has a beautiful figure,
Which he makes every effort to spoil,
For he knows if he gets a bit bigger
He increases the output of oil.

That is why he insists upon swathing
His person with layers of fat.
You have seen a financier bathing?
Well, the whale is a little like that.

At heart he's as mild as a pigeon
And extremely attached to his wife,
But getting mixed up with religion
Has ruined the animal's life.

For in spite of his tact and discretion
There is fixed in the popular mind
A wholly mistaken impression
That the whale is abrupt and unkind.

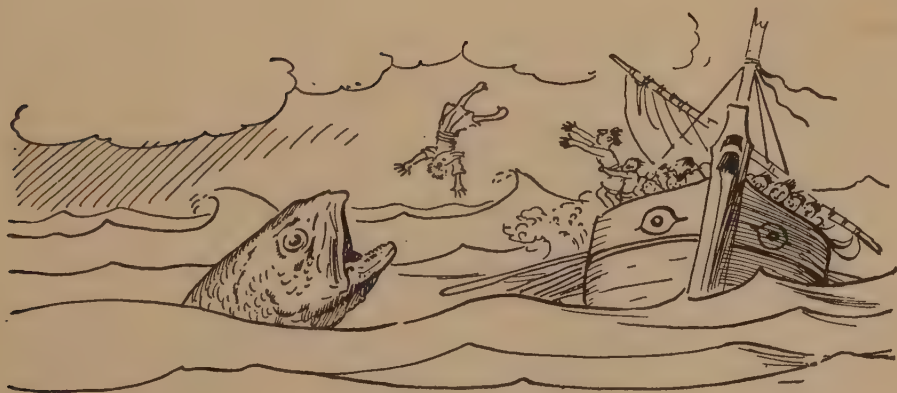


And it's simply because of the prophet
Who embarked in a ship for Tarshish
But was thrown (very properly) off it
And swallowed alive by a fish.

Now I should not, of course, have contested
The material truth of the tale
If the prophet himself had suggested
That the creature at fault was a whale.

But the prophet had no such suspicion.
And that is convincing because
He was constantly in a position
To see what the miscreant was.

And this is what punctures the bubble ;
As Jonah, no doubt, was aware,
A *fish* was the cause of the trouble,
But the whale is a *mammal*. So there !





The Worm

THE worms, the worms, the wriggly worms,
They keep on eating earth,
And always in the grossest terms
Complain about their birth ;
They have no eyes, they have no eyes,
They cannot read a book ;
I wonder if they realize
What dreadful things they look.

The trowel cuts them quite in half,
It is a bitter cup ;
They give a sour sardonic laugh
And sew the pieces up ;
They sew them up and wind away
With seeming unconcern,
But oh, be careful ! one fine day
I hear the worm will turn.

And though I don't know what it means,
I know what reptiles are ;
They love to make unpleasant scenes
When people go too far ;
However calm he seems to be
When only cut in two,
If you go cutting him



in three
I don't know *what* he'll do !



The Spider

HOW doth the jolly little spider
Wind up such miles of silk inside her?
The explanation seems to be
She does not eat so much as me.

And if I never, never cram
Myself with ginger-bread and jam,
Then maybe I'll have room to hide
A little rope in *my* inside.

Then I shall tie it very tight
Just over the electric light,
And hang head downward from the ceiling—
I wonder if one *minds* the feeling?

Or else I'd tie it to a tree
And let myself into the sea;
But when I wound it up again
I wonder if I'd have a pain?





The Grasshopper

THE grasshopper sits on the edge of the cliff,
Pretending he isn't awake,
But he hops out of sight with alacrity if
You offer him pieces of cake.

He is one of those *unsatisfactory* things
Which simply refuse to be fed ;
He has ears on his tummy, he talks with his wings,
So what is the use of his head ?

But he frequently makes an encouraging cry ;
Perhaps he is laying his eggs ;
And whenever he does it—I cannot say why—
He waggles his jolly back-legs.

And people who notice this curious fact
Are tempted to speculate whether
The grasshopper's song is produced by the act
Of rubbing these members together.

An attractive hypothesis, but I should say
It is clearly and hopelessly wrong ;
I have tried it myself,



I was trying to-day,
And it never results in a song.

While if you examine the animal's thighs
When he makes his peculiar call,
It is perfectly plain to unprejudiced eyes
That they never are touching at all.

Besides, it is not an unusual thing ;
You know, if you have to repeat
" O where and O where are the flowers of Spring ? "
You fidget about with your feet.

And whenever one watches



some amateur Bass

He is doing exactly the same—
Not only his feet but the fat on his face—
He is shaking all over his frame.

I have given this problem, I think you'll agree,
The attention it richly deserves,
And that is the only solution I see—
It is simply a question of *nerves*.



The Bee

I NEVER, never could admit
The virtues of the bee ;
I thought she seemed a dreadful prig
When I was small, and now I'm big,
I see she is



a hypocrite,
And so, of course, are we.

It's true she rushes to and fro,
With business promptitude,
But what about the busy ant ?
O let us clear our minds of cant !
Why is it that we love her so ?
She manufactures food.

But not for us! If it were shown
She organized the feast
For us to eat, one might agree
About her virtue, but, you see,
She does it for herself alone,
The greedy little beast.

So grasping is the little dear
That every now and then
She readjusts the ration scales
By simply killing off the males,
With many a vile malicious jeer
At "idle gentlemen."

Nor does a man of us cry "Shame!"
Though every man would own
If there is one high hope for which
He labours on at fever-pitch,
It is not Honour, Wealth or Fame—
He wants to be



a drone.

Why is it then we don't abhor

This horrid little prude ?

Why don't we cast the foulest slur

On such a Prussian character ?

Because, as I remarked before,

She manufactures food.

The earth is full of beasts, my son,

And I know two or three

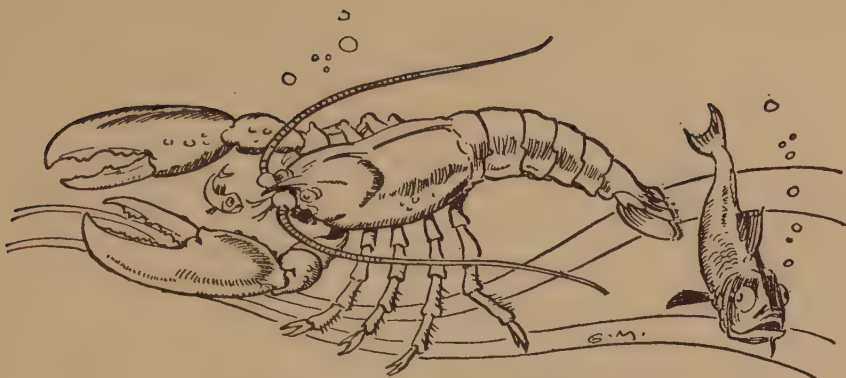
That any mother might employ

To be a model for her boy,

But take my word, they've overdone

The insufferable bee.





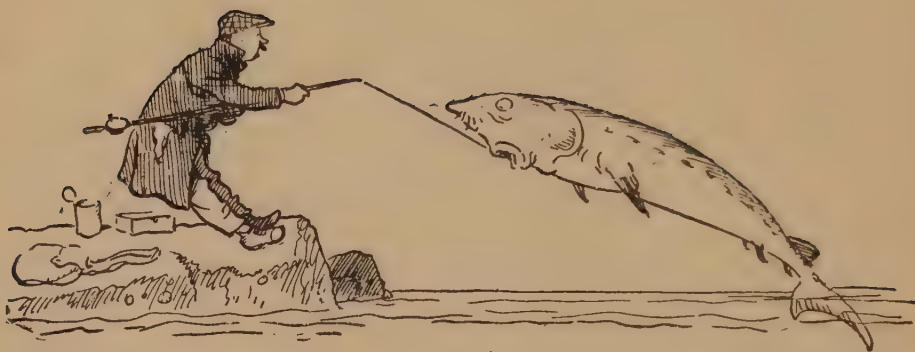
The Lobster

THE lobster is an oblong crab
With one or two antennae ;
I fancy life would be less drab
If people had as many.

I think he uses them to smell,
But what he most enjoys
Is rubbing them against his shell,
Which makes a funny noise.

He rubs away like anything,
And you should see his face !
Alas, he thinks that he can sing
But that is not the case.

He's very sensitive and shy ;
At last when he is dead
He knows the truth—and that is why
He goes so very red.



Caviare

THE sturgeon belongs to the King,
And if in some desolate chasm,
You feloniously catch one or two on a string
You must see that His Majesty has 'em.

The roe is exceedingly hard,
But when spread on a hot-buttered biscuit
It is held, I am told, in the highest regard,
Though I should not advise you to risk it.

All the same, it appeals to the King ;
Though he cannot pretend it is pleasant,
He can never, I know, have too much of the thing,
For it makes such a Suitable Present.

And Christmas is coming, it is,
So I think he would cut off your head
If he heard you had stolen a sturgeon of his—
He would certainly send you to bed.





The Glow-worm

THE little glow-worm sits and glows,
As brilliant as the stars,
But you are wrong if you suppose
That he will light cigars.

In fact, he seems to be exempt
From Nature's general plan ;
He never makes the least attempt
To be of use to Man.

And if you think that it requires
A scientific brain
To understand his tiny fires,
Then you are wrong again.

The meaning of his shininess
Is fairly clear to me ;
It is intended to impress
The future Mrs. G.



No doubt you think it is his nose
Which gleams across the glen;
Well, it is not; the part that glows
Is on the abdomen.

So very likely that explains
Why all these millionaires
Buy such expensive shiny chains
To hang about



on theirs.

* * * * *

A Publisher who read these lines
Has quite a different tale;
He says it is the *she* that shines
To captivate the male.

He has a perfect right to doubt
The statements in this song,
But if he thinks I'll scratch them out,
He's *absolutely* wrong.



The Sponge

THE sponge is not, as you suppose,
A funny kind of weed ;
He lives below the deep blue sea,
An animal, like you and me,
Though not so good a breed.

And when the sponges go to sleep
The fearless diver dives ;
He prongs them with a cruel prong,
And, what I think is rather wrong,
He also prongs their wives.

For I expect they love them well,
And sing them little songs,
And though, of course, they have no heart,
It hurts them when they're forced to part—
Especially with prongs.



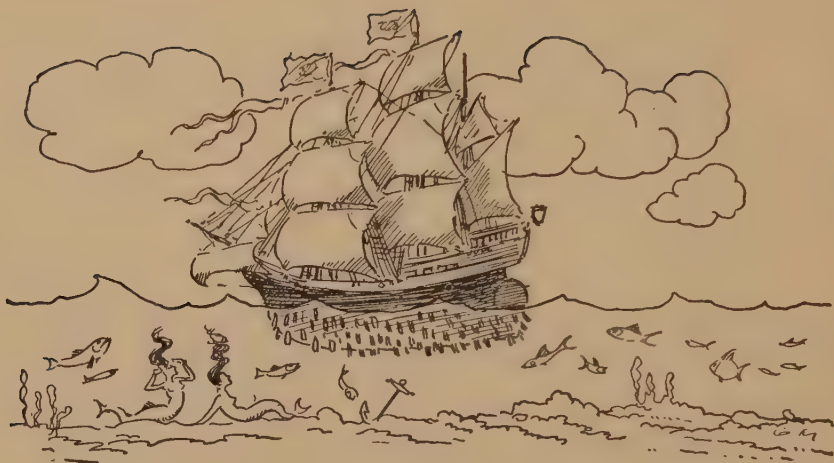
I know you'd rather not believe
Such dreadful things are done ;
Alas, alas, it is the case ;
And every time you wash your face
You use a skeleton.

While that round hole in which you put
Your finger and your thumb,
And tear the nice new sponge in two,
As I have told you *not* to do,
Was once his osculum.

So that is why I seldom wash,
However black I am,
Or use my flannel if I must,
Though even that, to be quite just,
Was once



a little lamb.



The Barnacle

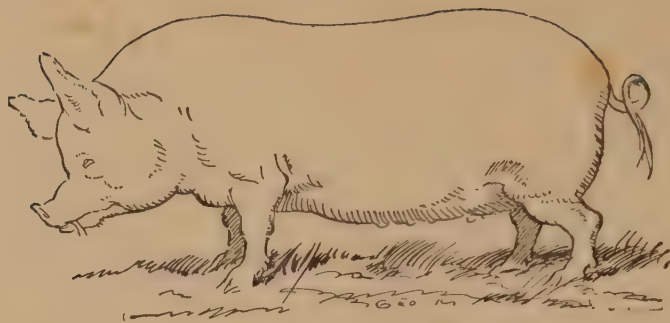
(A Sort of Sea Shanty)

OLD Bill Barnacle sticks to his ship,
He never is ill on the stormiest trip;
Upside down he crosses the ocean—
If you do that you *enjoy* the motion.

Barnacle's family grows and grows,
Little relations arrive in rows;
And the quicker the barnacles grow, you know,
The slower the ship doth go—yo, ho!

Thousands of barnacles, small and great,
Stick to the jolly old ship of State;
So we mustn't be cross if she seems to crawl—
It's rather a marvel she goes at all.



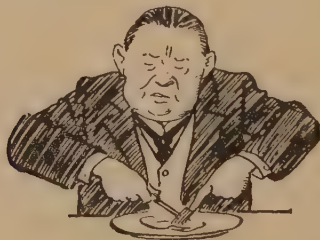


The Pig

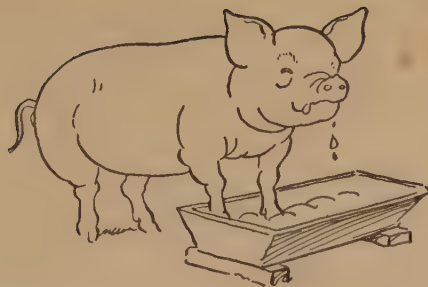
THE way in which he eats and drinks
Is so extremely crude
That nearly everybody thinks
The pig enjoys his food.

But when I see how very fast,
Without one single chew,
He gobbles up his huge repast,
I'm sure it isn't true.

Far nobler than



your Uncle Joe,
Who simply sits and sits,
Revolving, gluttonous and slow,
The more attractive bits ;

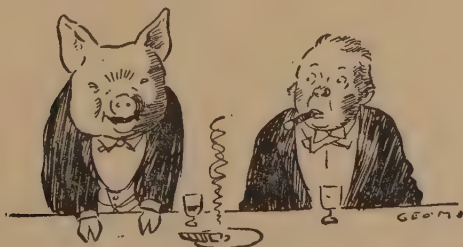


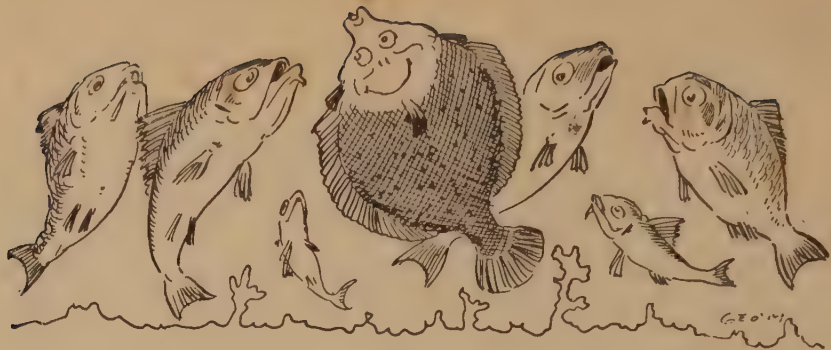
Far nobler than your Uncle Dick,
Who frankly lives for food,
And if he doesn't have the pick
Is very, very rude ;

The pig has not a word to say
To subtleties of taste ;
He eats whatever comes his way
With unaffected haste.

You see, he merely eats to live,
And though, of course, he squeals,
Apart from that he seems to give
No trouble at his meals.

In fact the pig may well resent
The insult to his line
When certain of the affluent
Are said to eat like swine.





A Sea Shindy

OLD John Sole
Is a merry old soul,
And the jolliest fish I know;
He may look flat,
But what of that?
He's fine and fat—
Yo, ho!

He's a rough old roysterer so-o-oul
And you should see him ro-o-oll
From the Tuskar to the Po-o-ole
When the great fish-bumpers flow!

And when the soles
Come rolling home
With bowls and bowls
Of bubbly foam,
Then on the whole
The jolliest fish—
Then on the whole
The jolliest fish,
The jolliest fish I kno-o-ow
Is Old-John-Sole.





But Samuel Weevil
Has gone to the deevil,
He lives in a yacht,
In a stolen yacht,
A piratical yacht,
On the Barbary
Seas

On whisky hot
And contraband cheese—
He lives in a yacht
On the Barbary Seas,
Or else he does not—
Whichever you please—
Heave-a-hearty, a barrel of rum !
You can do that
If you like to risk it,
But you'll have to live
In a Captain's biscuit—
Heave-a-hearty, a barrel of rum,
A barrel of rum
On the Barbary Seas !





The Oyster

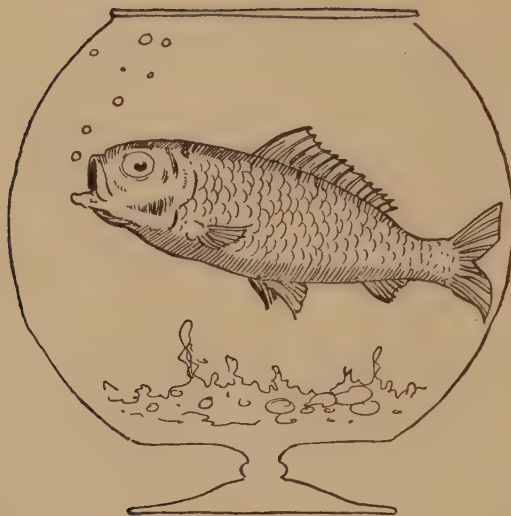
THE oyster takes no exercise ;
I don't believe she really tries,
And since she has no legs
I don't see why she should, do you ?
Besides, she has a lot to do—
She lays a million eggs ;
At any rate she doesn't stir ;
Her food is always brought to her.

But sometimes through her open lips
A horrid little creature slips
Which simply will not go ;
And that annoys the poor old girl,
It means she has to make a pearl—
It *irritates*, you know ;
So, crooning some small requiem,
She turns the worm into a gem.

And when I meet



the wives of Earls
With lovely necklaces of pearls,
It makes me see quite red ;
For every jewel on the chain
Some patient oyster had a pain
And had to go to bed ;
Just think what millions men can make
Out of an oyster's tummy-ache !



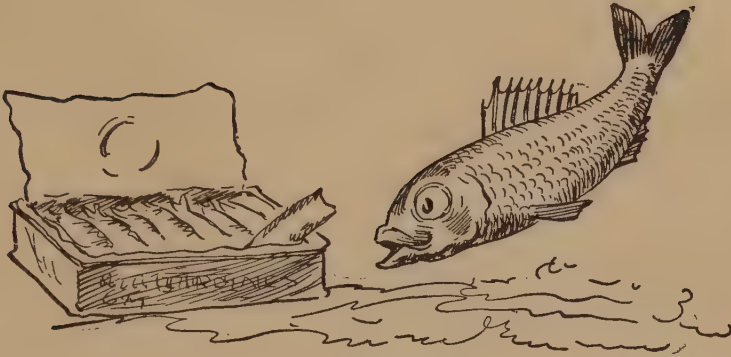
The Goldfish

THE goldfish is shy,
And quickly upset ;
He cannot think why
He never is ate.

It's because he is red ;
But suppose he was green,
We should cut off his head
As a common sardine.

He has much the same nose,
He is much the same size,
And I do not suppose
He is any more wise.

He has only to thank
His peculiar skin
That he's kept in a tank
And not



in a tin.

It's a shame, I allow,
But you had to be told;
You'll appreciate now
The importance of gold.



The Ermine

THE ermine is not quite as grand as he sounds ;
As a rule he is shot if he comes in the grounds ;
You have seen him about by the mulberry tree,
Though I very much doubt if you knew it was he.

He is shot with a gun and hung up by the throat,
For the ermine, my son, is the same as the stoat ;
So when Auntie has got just a little more ermine
You can tell her (or not) she is covered



with vermin.

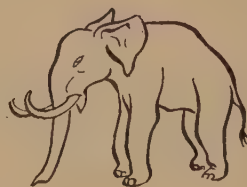


“If we could all be something else”

IF we could all be something else,
What would you choose to be?
I'd be a squirrel if I could,
And all the squirrels in the wood
Should come and climb with me.



Or else I'd be a butterfly—
But then, it doesn't last.
An elephant? Perhaps a horse.
But nothing like the hen, of course,
They have to eat so fast.



The porpoise has a lovely time;
He simply bathes all day.
How nice and haughty it must feel
To dive like that beneath the keel,
And then just swim away!





The cow has nothing much to do ;
The ox is never ill.
I sometimes think I'd like to be
A very shady cedar-tree—
But then, they stand so still.

Of course, we might be antelopes,
If that is what they are—
The things that leap from rock to
rock,
And no one ever has a shock
Because they jump too far.



And yet, if we were antelopes,
However fast we ran,
We'd hardly ever see the sea,
We couldn't even climb a tree—
I'd rather be



a man.





